Take 6 Steps to Improve Your Workplace Health Culture

Safety professionals talk a lot about the *safety* culture within their workplaces. But workplaces also have a *health* culture, which can impact workers' overall wellness. A recent study looked at the relationship between employees' perception of the health culture in their workplaces and their overall health.

Aon Hewitt, the National Business Group on Health and The Futures Company conducted [*The Consumer Health Mindset study*](). The study was mainly based on the results of an online survey administered in the US in Aug. and Sept. 2013. A group of 2,732 consumers'including both employees and dependents covered by employer health plans'completed it. The respondents represented various demographic categories, employer size (with 1,000 employees or more), types of health plans and health conditions. (You can download a report on the study below.)

Key findings from the study:

- Respondents were more likely to say employers don't recognize health achievements, don't take employee health into account when making business decisions and offer few healthy choices in cafes or vending machines.
- One-quarter of employees characterized their workplace as having a strong culture of health, while another one-quarter said their workplace had a weak health culture.

- Employees in companies with weak health cultures are more likely to be overweight or obese, while employees in a strong culture of health are more likely to do the right things for their health.
- Employees in weak cultures of health are also more likely to say stress has a negative impact on work activities versus those in strong health cultures (49% versus 25%).
- Making health a priority and encouraging healthy activities during the workday are the top two drivers of perceptions of a strong culture.
- The characteristic that has the greatest impact on perceptions of a weak health culture is leaders not actively encouraging employee health or serving as role models, followed closely by lack of recognition.
- Employees are slightly less likely to see their direct manager or department head as supportive relative to how they see support from their employer overall. Specifically, more than four in 10 employees say the manager is only slightly or not supportive.

Based on the findings from the study, take these six steps to improve your workplace's health culture:

1. Make health improvement a priority in your business and integrate that priority into your business plans.
2. Ensure that company leaders actively encourage employee health and serve as role models.
3. Celebrate employee role models and put them in a position to help their co-workers.
4. Find ways to acknowledge progress'not just results. For example, celebrate employees who have made significant health strides in a town hall meeting or with a personal letter from the CEO.
5. Train managers to support workplace wellness each day and show them how they can give their employees reasonable flexibility to participate in health

activities and encourage positive health behaviours throughout the workday.

6. Give employees opportunities in their daily work lives to make small, positive health choices in ways that don't take a lot of time or money. For example, start a campaign to promote drinking water, create a picture-based 'eat this, not that' campaign or sponsor on-site cooking classes that teach healthy cooking in right-sized portions. (Learn more about encouraging healthy eating in the workplace with a [food and beverage policy](#).)